Martyr

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Summary: He knew this was the end. And he'd known it for a long time.

Chapter 1: Martyr

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He knew this was the end.

And he'd known it for a long time.

For a while, he had been afraid, even choosing to forsake what he knew he had to do. Sometimes, he wondered what would have happened if he hadn't chosen this path that would lead to his downfall. In a way, he was pleased. If he died, what the fortuneteller had said would come true.

"If you leave on this quest, you shall die and be branded a heretic forever. Are you sure?"

He had smiled grimly and nodded his head. "Yes, there comes the time for everyone that they must choose between themselves and the good of the world. I guess my time just came really early."

But that was years ago. In reality, it was a miracle he had lived to see this day. He had but one regret: he would not be the only one to die. In his decision, he had sealed the fate of the others; some of them never knew it was suicide.

The blade pierced his stomach now, and he cried out in pain before the blood, his very life, was pouring out of his mouth. He smiled as he crashed into the stone floor. Soon he wouldn't feel the pain anymore.

Strolling through the streets of his snowy hometown, he waved at a few acquaintances and dodged a few playful snowballs. One exploded on the back of his head, dusting him with the wet slush. He had turned around, and saw her.

He smiled.

She snickered.

And life went on.

No one knew his secret. He dared not tell them. Only the elder and village leader knew.
And that fortuneteller.

He had stepped into her dwelling cautiously, knowing her reputation as being a little unhinged. She had proved to be quite kindly, like a grandmother would be. However, the cheerful air about them was shattered the second she read his fate.

He had a choice, and in its simplest form, it was life or death. But nothing was ever simple for him anymore.

"There are two paths I see. The first I expect you will choose. You shall stay here and live your life for many years. You shall get married, and have children. This is the path of your happiness, as well as your life."

"And the other is?" He had questioned, edging closer to her, "Tell me."

"As you wish. You shall leave on the quest to retrieve the stars and light the lighthouses of the elements. You shall fail in your first attempt, and many shall die. The second time, you shall die in a fierce battle, and be marked in the annals of history as a villain consumed by power lust."

His eyebrows had furrowed at that, "And what good would come of that?" he whispered, one hand slightly shaking.

She had smiled at him kindly, patting a hand on his head. "That path, my dear boy, will bring about the regeneration of the world. If you will not undertake this, the world will swallow itself up, and your children, or perhaps your grandchildren shall be lost with it, as well as the rest of humanity."

He had rubbed his chin as he contemplated the choices. "Either I live out my life in happiness, or I die a martyr misjudged . . ."

He agonized over it many nights, his dreams turning to nightmares as he saw his friends, family, and people he didn't even know cry out in agony as they died a thousand horrible deaths. Often he woke up screaming, crying, or in other such distress.

He knew what he had to do.

"If you leave on this quest, you shall die and be branded a heretic forever. Are you sure?" She had said, her voice unemotional.

He had smiled grimly and nodded his head. "Yes, there comes the time for everyone that they must choose between themselves and the good of the world. I guess my time just came really early."

He had leapt upon the ship then, his companions, all but one destined to die, followed suit.

As the ship had sailed off into the horizon, she whispered. "A martyr . . . knowing you will die, you set out anyway. Next time you leave, you will never come back. Despite knowing

you will be branded, you ran to fight for us. I . . . shall try to change that. For now, stay alive."

Some of the villagers said that was the first day they had ever seen her cry. And it was the last as well. Before he had arrived back, the slaughter complete, she had died. In her hand, a note was scrawled, clenched tightly. Next to her, she had left another note. "Read my hand when fate has come to pass."

So the note remained unread. And it would stay that way for a long time.

He was dying; he had lost too much blood. Still, he struggled to his feet and flung the tiny stone into the hole into the ground, increasing his power tenfold. His partner thought they could win this.

He knew better.

But, he thought, at least he could give them something to remember, lest they try and stop fate.

The two-headed dragon reared a head, and gave an earth-shattering roar.

The snow continued to fall as the townsfolk mourned. A young man with dark hair, out of place among them, pulled a note, and laid it at the gravestone as he read it.

"Here lies the blade of Saturos, martyr of Prox. He chose death so that others could live, may he and his companions rest in peace."

Taking the blood-red sword and stabbing it into the frozen ground, he knelt there, even as the rest left. Slowly, a boy with wild blonde hair came forward, his golden scarf blowing in the harsh winds.

"Felix, I'm . . ."

Felix had raised his head and smiled. "It's okay, Isaac, it's what he wanted, as long as I never forget him, I can live with what has happened."

"A martyr . . ." Isaac had muttered, "under different circumstances, we could have helped them . . ."

Felix said nothing as he knelt at the grave. As Isaac left, he broke down into sobs.

"For all that happened to you and Menardi, I'll find a way to make sure . . . that part of history is changed for you. For all that you've done for me . . . for everyone, it's the least I can do."

He stepped to his feet and turned, pushing through the snowdrifts.

"I'll never come back until I clear your name."

He never did.